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SUBJECT: OSCE/PERMANENT COUNCIL: REACTION TO RELEASE OF  
PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE IN BELARUS

11. Post is authorized to present the following statement at  
the Permanent Council meeting in Vienna on September 4.

Begin text:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes the August 20 release of the last  
two Belarusian prisoners of conscience, Andrey Kim and  
Syarhey Parsyukevich. This follows closely the August 16  
release of former Presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin.  
The release of all prisoners of conscience is a positive  
step. This is a development in the right direction by  
Belarus to abide by the commitments it undertook as a member  
of the OSCE to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and  
democratic norms.

To signal our support for the release, Deputy Assistant  
Secretary of State David Merkel traveled to Minsk on August  
21 to 23 to develop a dialogue with Belarusian government  
officials and deepen our contacts with the democratic  
opposition. He had productive meetings with Foreign Minister  
Martynov, Presidential Administration Deputy Chief Petkevich,  
and Central Election Commission Chairwoman Yermoshina. He  
also met with opposition and civil society leaders, including  
Mr. Kazulin.

Continued steps by Government of Belarus that show they are  
truly committed to democratic reform could lead to a  
significant improvement of relations between the United  
States and Belarus, including the removal of visa and  
economic sanctions. Ensuring a conducive environment for  
free and fair parliamentary elections on September 28, both  
during the run-up and on election day itself, will be  
important in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

End text.

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